

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

July 20, 2010

President Obama: Oil Spill Cap Is Good News, but Work Remains	1
Statement by Clinton on Nelson Mandela International Day	1
U.S. Urges Thailand to Lift State of Emergency	2
Reducing Security Threats Enhances Middle East Peace Prospects.....	2
U.S. Cities Lead the Way on Climate Change Policies	3

President Obama: Oil Spill Cap Is Good News, but Work Remains

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama welcomed the fitting of a new cap over BP's leaking Deepwater Horizon oil well in the Gulf of Mexico as a sign of progress in dealing with the environmental disaster, but warned Americans "we're not done," even if continuing tests indicate the leak has been plugged.

"The new cap is good news. Either we will be able to use it to stop the flow, or we will be able to use it to capture almost all of the oil until the relief well is done," Obama told reporters at the White House July 16. But he added, "We're not going to know for certain which approach makes sense until additional data is in."

Experts have been testing the pressure inside the cap every six hours since it was placed earlier in the week. According to press reports, a low pressure reading could indicate that oil is still being released from the well at locations different from where the pipeline ruptured April 20.

"What they're working to determine is whether we can safely shut in the well using the new cap without creating new problems, including possibly countless new oil leaks in the seafloor," Obama said.

Even if the well cannot be shut in, the new cap and additional equipment that are being placed in the Gulf will be able to contain up to 80,000 barrels of oil per day, the president said, nearly all of the oil that is currently leaking out of the well. Obama said that before the new cap was installed, only about 25,000 barrels per day was able to be contained.

"Even if it turns out that we can't maintain this cap and completely shut off the flow of oil, what the new cap allows us to do is to essentially attach many more containment mechanisms so that we're able to take more oil up to the surface [and] put it on ships. It won't be spilling into the Gulf," the president said.

But the ultimate solution to stopping the leak will be the completion of relief wells that will kill the spill from the bottom, Obama said. While the drilling of the relief wells is "slightly ahead of target," the president said it could take some time to connect them to drain the well. According to press reports, BP officials have said they may be ready to conduct that operation in about a month.

The president said residents and businesses in the Gulf continue to suffer due to the disaster, and he assured

Americans that his administration will make decisions "based on science, based on what's best for the people of the Gulf," rather than public relations or political interests.

He warned that when the leak is confirmed to be plugged, many will mistakenly believe that the crisis is over.

"We've still got a big job to do. There's still a lot of oil out there. And that's why we've got more skimmers out there, [and] there's better coordination on the ground along the shorelines," he said.

Along with continuing to clean up the spill, the administration will be working to ensure that the \$20 billion compensation fund from BP is set up and "acting expeditiously," he said.

"BP is going to be paying for the damage that it has caused. And that's going to involve not only paying for the environmental disaster and cleanup but also compensating people who've been affected," the president said.

The recent weather conditions in the Gulf have aided cleanup efforts and provided "a little break in the action," according to retired Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen, who is the national incident commander overseeing the efforts to stop the leak and clean up the oil spill.

Speaking in New Orleans July 15, Allen said the region is experiencing calmer weather and winds are directing the oil on the water surface away from the shore.

"That's allowing us to marshal our forces, to be able to do some repair, assess where the boom might've been blown ashore with the recent heavy weather that we had. And it's giving us a chance to kind of consolidate our forces and make sure we can redouble our efforts on shore cleanup," Allen said.

Statement by Clinton on Nelson Mandela International Day

U.S. honors Mandela on contributions, lifelong commitment to human dignity

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
July 15, 2010

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Nelson Mandela International Day

On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I congratulate Nelson Mandela and join the world in celebrating his 92nd birthday this Sunday. I am

honored and humbled to call President Mandela my friend. Like millions of his admirers around the world, I am deeply moved by his generosity of spirit and unfailing courage in the face of overwhelming obstacles. After 26 years locked in an apartheid prison, he emerged to lead South Africa's transition from the division of apartheid to an integrated, multi-racial democracy. He embraced his jailers without bitterness or hatred and provided an example to his own people and people everywhere.

Last year, the United States joined 192 other United Nations member states in supporting the creation of Nelson Mandela International Day. Its first observance on July 18 this year honors President Mandela's extraordinary contributions and lifelong commitment to justice and human dignity.

Nelson Mandela is a hero to people of all backgrounds and experience who strive for freedom and progress. His story is filled with an amazing strength and integrity of spirit. There is no one more deserving of this unprecedented international recognition, and I am delighted to offer him my warmest wishes on this special day.

U.S. Urges Thailand to Lift State of Emergency

By Daniel Schearf
VOA News

Bangkok — A top U.S. envoy has urged the Thai government to lift the state of emergency it has been under since April. Thai authorities say the strict controls are needed to prevent unrest while critics say they are being used to silence government opponents and limit freedom of expression. The U.S. envoy also urged Thailand to push its neighbor Burma for credible elections.

U.S. Under Secretary of State William Burns on July 16 said he told Thai officials emergency decrees imposed on much of the country ought to be lifted as soon as possible.

The emergency powers allow the government to deploy soldiers to maintain order, detain people without charge for up to a month, and censor the media.

Thai authorities last week extended the state of emergency for Bangkok and 18 provinces for another three months. The government says the strict controls are needed to prevent unrest.

But speaking to an audience at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University, Burns said it was in Thailand's own interest to lift the state of emergency. He said the decrees are not healthy for any democratic system.

"Now more than ever, it is critical for all Thai leaders to

promote dialogue and reconciliation, to recognize the legitimate grievances of Thai citizens and to support the equal and impartial application of the rule of law," he said.

Thai authorities imposed the state of emergency after anti-government protesters in April broke into the Parliament building, forcing leaders to flee by helicopter.

Thousands of demonstrators occupied central Bangkok from March to May demanding the government step down and allow new elections.

Clashes between soldiers and protesters left 90 people dead, most of them civilians, and almost 2,000 injured.

The U.S. under secretary of state also urged Thailand to use its leadership in the region to press Burma for political reform ahead of elections expected later this year.

"The United States and Thailand have a shared interest in pressing for an inclusive, transparent and credible electoral process. A first step toward this should be a genuine dialogue among all stakeholders and the release of more than 2,100 political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi," he said.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won Burma's last elections, two decades ago, but Burma's military rulers ignored the results.

She has been kept locked up most of the time since and is banned from running for office.

Burma's neighbors, including Thailand, have been criticized for putting lucrative trade with the military government above human rights concerns.

The United States last year began a policy of engaging with Burma but maintains economic sanctions along with the European Union, Canada and other nations.

Reducing Security Threats Enhances Middle East Peace Prospects

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A nuclear-armed Iran would pose the greatest threat to regional security in the Middle East, says Assistant Secretary of State Andrew Shapiro.

"While the most grave, the Iranian nuclear program is one of many serious security threats in the region," Shapiro added during a July 16 speech at the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based policy research center. Conventional arms can be — and often are — as dangerous and threatening as a nuclear device, he said.

"These conventional challenges intersect with the asymmetrical threats posed by Hezbollah and Hamas, whose rockets indiscriminately target Israeli population centers, and whose extensive arms-smuggling operations, many of which originate in Tehran and Damascus, weaken regional security and disrupt efforts to establish lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors," Shapiro said.

"As Secretary [of State Hillary Rodham] Clinton has often said, the status quo is unsustainable. Without a comprehensive regional peace, the Middle East will never unlock its full potential, and Israel will never be fully secure," Shapiro said.

"President Obama has also made achieving peace and recognized secure borders for Israel a top administration priority," he said.

Shapiro, who is the assistant secretary for political-military affairs at the State Department, told the audience that for more than six decades Israelis have guarded their borders effectively. But with advances in technology, new levels of U.S.-Israeli security cooperation are required.

"Despite efforts at containment, rockets with better guidance systems, greater range and more destructive power are spreading across the region," Shapiro said in his prepared remarks. He added that the terrorist groups Hezbollah to the north of Israel and Hamas to the south have amassed thousands of short-range and medium-range rockets, and while still crude, they pose a serious danger to civilian lives.

Shapiro said a secure Israel makes it easier to advance the peace process.

"This administration believes that pursuing peace between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel and its neighbors can be a mutually reinforcing process," he said. "We are fully committed to Israel's security because it enhances our own national security and because it helps Israel to take the steps necessary for peace."

U.S. Cities Lead the Way on Climate Change Policies

Hundreds of municipalities have set targets to reduce emissions.

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — More than half of the world's population now resides in cities, and urban areas account for an estimated 75 percent (PDF, 145KB) of global energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. But those facts don't tell the whole story.

"Cities are actually the greenest place on Earth," said Joan Fitzgerald, a professor at Northeastern University in

Boston and author of *Emerald Cities: Urban Sustainability and Economic Development*, a book highlighting city success stories. "Cities, by virtue of their density, use less energy."

Apartment buildings always will be more energy-efficient than a free-standing home, Fitzgerald said. People in cities also walk and use public transportation more than noncity dwellers, keeping per capita emissions relatively low. That's why cities and their growing populations will be a key part of the solution to climate change, she said.

Transportation and buildings are the two largest contributors to climate change, and in this area, cities can — and increasingly do — set an example.

In the United States, a number of municipalities have set their own targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and they're taking advantage of federal and private funding to meet their goals. The East Coast city of Philadelphia, for example, plans to cut emissions by 20 percent below 2005 levels over the next decade and has a number of projects under way.

The city of 1.5 million people received a \$17 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation this year to expand bicycle and pedestrian trails that will reduce car traffic. Buildings throughout the city are being retrofitted to waste less energy, thanks to a \$25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy, and a tree-planting campaign has begun.

Smaller projects also are progressing. Nearly 500 solar-powered trash cans that automatically compress garbage have been installed in the city, reducing truck collections by more than half. Many of the trash cans also have recycling bins next to them. The city is now collecting between 14 tons and 18 tons of recyclables a week from those bins, said Sarah Wu, outreach and policy coordinator for the Philadelphia Mayor's Office of Sustainability.

Farther north, New York City is installing 100 electric charging stations to encourage drivers to purchase electric cars. The city also recently created three "solar empowerment zones" to direct resources to neighborhoods suitable for solar power installations. Using a mix of tax breaks and grants, the city of 8.3 million has seen a rush of applications for subsidized solar panel projects in the last year. The city's goal is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 30 percent by 2030.

Many cities struggling through the economic recession are financially motivated to make buildings more energy efficient and to explore alternative power sources, said Martin Chavez, executive director of Local Governments for Sustainability USA, an organization representing more

than 500 municipalities seeking to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. "Every policymaker and executive is looking for ways to balance a very difficult budget and retrofitting buildings and cutting energy costs makes financial sense," said Chavez, a former mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico. "This technology costs money upfront but [the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic stimulus bill Congress passed in 2009], has made a big difference for cities and their ability to fund these programs."

Boise, the state capital of Idaho in the western United States with nearly 206,000 residents, built the country's first geothermal heating district in 1983 and has recently been expanding the district with the help of a federal grant. Sacramento, the capital of California, is turning landfill methane gas — a potent greenhouse gas — into power for 8,900 homes. This is equivalent to taking 117,000 cars off the road, city officials say. Sacramento has more than 407,000 residents.

A number of movements and trends are converging to give cities the impetus to forge ahead on climate issues, Fitzgerald said. "We've had an environmental justice movement, a smart grid movement, a new urbanism movement around since the late 1980s, early 1990s — and now we have a green jobs movement," she said. "Mayors who get it take leadership, and once it gets started it feeds on itself."

(Preceding items distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://america.gov>)